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# Catholic voter guide differs from two Catholic candidates

David Gibson Religion News Service | Mar. 1, 2012

A group of Democratic-leaning Catholics on Wednesday released a 2012 voter guide that seeks to expand the concept of "pro-life issues" beyond abortion to also include war, euthanasia and poverty.

The nine-page guide from the group Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good -- one of the first to be released for the 2012 elections -- highlights economic issues as top concerns Catholics should weigh as they consider their vote.

The guide is markedly different from others circulated by conservative Catholic groups, which stress opposition to abortion rights as a non-negotiable stance for American Catholics.

Most notably, the new guide stands in stark contrast to the positions of the two Catholic presidential candidates, Rick Santorum and Newt Gingrich, whose culture war rhetoric has dominated political discourse in recent weeks.

While the authors said they took their cues from the U.S. bishops' own voting priorities, the new guide does not mention gay marriage, which the Catholic bishops increasingly regard as a threat on par with legalized abortion.

The guide from Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good takes the words of Pope Benedict XVI's teachings on social justice as its starting point, and from there contrasts the church's social teaching on the common good with the "explicitly anti-Christian teachings" of the Tea Party and like-minded movements.

In unusually strong, populist tones, the guide's authors decry efforts to cut government programs for the poor and middle class while protecting tax rates for the "super-rich." They "denounce this new ideology as un-Christian, un-Catholic, and, indeed, as a perversion of America's own best traditions."

Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good was founded in 2005 by Tom Perriello, who went on to serve a single term as a Democratic congressman from Virginia. The group is led by Obama supporters like Stephen Schneck, head of the Institute for Policy Research & Catholic Studies at The Catholic University of America, and liberal Catholics like Alfred M. Rotondaro of the Center for American Progress in Washington.

The CACG guide lists seven main issues that Catholic voters should consider, starting with the economy and the "unconscionably high rate of unemployment." So-called "pro-life issues" come next, echoing the late Pope John Paul II's call for creating a "culture of life," that considers "abortion, war, euthanasia, and poverty."

The CACG also defends unions and "workers rights," and President Barack Obama's health care law and immigration reform.

The guide addresses "religious liberty," but instead of embracing the U.S. bishops' fight against Obama's birth control mandate, the guide instead issues a call to "oppose efforts to demean (religious liberty) by turning it into a partisan issue."

The U.S. bishops last fall released their own voter guide, a dense, 30-page document called "Faithful Citizenship." Many conservatives criticized that document as insufficiently clear in telling Catholics not to vote for candidates who support abortion rights or gay rights.

The authors of the Catholics in Alliance voter guide said they took the bishops' statement as their guide, but add that they "do not in any way wish to claim for ourselves the right to speak for the Catholic Church, nor for all Catholics."

"Instead, we offer this voter guide to show how we apply the teachings of our church to the problems of our day."

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